

# Appendix 18

## A1 and A2

### Subwatershed

### Update Process

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#### **Introduction**

The Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP) provides an integrated management strategy to address aquatic, terrestrial, landscape and socio-economic issues. A critical piece of this integrated strategy is a system of A1 and A2 subwatersheds which is designed to anchor the recovery and viability of widely distributed native fishes by avoiding or reducing short-term risks to key populations and helping focus restoration of aquatic habitats. These areas are not static, long-term reserves but instead are dynamic and intended to respond to new information and changing conditions. What follows is a description of the aquatic/riparian/hydrologic component of the management direction and how the A1/A2 subwatersheds would be updated and changed in the future.

#### **Aquatic/Riparian/ Hydrologic Component**

The aquatic/riparian/hydrologic component of the ecosystem management strategy was developed to maintain and restore the ecological health of watersheds and aquatic ecosystems on Forest Service- and BLM-administered lands. The focus is on long-term aquatic species viability through conservation and restoration of watershed condition, water quality, and aquatic and riparian habitat, and addressing short- and long-term risks to these resources from management activities, as well as long-term risks from uncharacteristic natural disturbances. The management direction in Chapter 3 promotes the achievement of these objectives through a variety of methods.

Base-level aquatic/riparian/hydrologic direction includes management standards to prevent degradation to, and allow restoration of, riparian conservation areas (RCAs). Restoration direction includes both integrated (multiple resources) and functional (one resource) broad-scale restoration priorities and strategic guidance to achieve healthy, functioning landscapes and watersheds. The step-down direction also contributes to aquatic/riparian/hydrologic objectives through requiring multi-scaled analysis in which risks of disturbance and management opportunities are identified, and context for management activities are defined—including the maintenance and restoration of landscapes, watersheds, and aquatic habitats. Also within the step-down direction are monitoring and adaptive management requirements that detect desirable and undesirable changes so management actions can be modified or designed to achieve aquatic goals and objectives. The collaborative implementation structure promoted by the management direction will also assist in the consistent and appropriate interpretation and application of aquatic/riparian/hydrologic management direction.

Another critical component of the integrated aquatic/riparian/hydrologic strategy is the system of A1/A2 subwatersheds, which are designed to contribute to recovery and viability of widely distributed native fishes. The primary focus of the management direction for these subwatersheds is conservation and restoration while minimizing short-term risk from management activities.

As one piece of the overall strategy, the A1/A2 subwatersheds form an anchor for recovery and viability of widely distributed salmonids. Strategic restoration guidance, including broad-scale priorities, describes the importance of securing and/or restoring A1/A2 subwatersheds and describes the importance of extending favorable aquatic habitat conditions outward from A1/A2 subwatersheds through restoring adjacent or nearby subwatersheds. Riparian conservation area management would further extend favorable aquatic and riparian conditions over time. Overall, the A1/A2 subwatersheds, restoration direction and priorities, and RCA management direction, in combination with step-down processes and monitoring should contribute to a network of connected and productive aquatic habitats and move toward the goals of sustaining and restoring aquatic and riparian ecosystems and contributing to recovery and delisting of threatened and endangered species.

## A1 and A2 Subwatersheds

The A1/A2 subwatersheds were identified using the following criteria:

- ♦ known strong populations for seven key salmonids (bull trout, steelhead trout, stream-type chinook salmon, ocean-type chinook salmon, westslope cutthroat trout, redband trout, and Yellowstone cutthroat trout);
- ♦ important anadromous fish populations in the Snake River Basin;
- ♦ genetically pure populations of anadromous fish outside the Snake River Basin;
- ♦ fringe populations for four of the key salmonids,
- ♦ percent of federal ownership within the subwatershed;
- ♦ percent of designated wilderness within the subwatershed; and
- ♦ road density

Since data are not available to characterize habitat quality, wilderness and road density serve as indicators of habitat condition and are the basis for distinguishing between A1 and A2 subwatersheds. Aquatic habitats are largely at desired conditions in A1 subwatersheds, whereas A2 subwatersheds require restoration. The ICBEMP Record of Decision will define the roles, objectives, and final criteria used to delineate A1 and A2 subwatersheds. Map 3-11a shows the location of A1 and A2 subwatersheds, based on the broad-scale information and application of the revised criteria.

The broad-scale information in these criteria can be improved upon through the step-down process. Between the issuance of the Supplemental Draft EIS and the Final EIS, the data used to delineate the A1 and A2 subwatersheds were updated. The direction for the A1 and A2 subwatersheds will amend and take precedence over existing direction in the land use plans for BLM and Forest Service field units. This direction will guide future management until local information used during Subbasin Reviews or other mid- and finer-scale assessments refine the A1 and A2 subwatershed system.

## Validating/Refining A1/A2 Designations Through Step-Down

The step-down process will validate and, as necessary, refine A1/A2 locations based on existing finer-scale information assembled through collaborative mid-scale assessments (for example, Subbasin Review) and planning efforts, as well as through finer-scale assessments such as EAWS. Information used in the step-down process would be compared with A1/A2 objectives and criteria to determine more precise locations and boundaries. For example, finer-scale information about strong fish populations may indicate that an area within a particular subbasin should be added to or removed from the A1/A2 system. Local habitat quality information would also be used to better discriminate between A1 and A2 designations. Such “fine-tuning” of A1/A2 delineations using Record of Decision definitions does not constitute a new decision warranting plan amendment or associated NEPA analysis. It implements the decision in the ROD to designate A1/A2 areas meeting the defined criteria and intent. Language clarifying this expectation will be included in the Record of Decision. The recent update of information on species’ status and distribution should reduce the likelihood of substantial changes within a particular subbasin (for example, adding or removing several A1/A2 subwatershed designations). If substantial shifts do occur, it may be necessary to analyze and disclose effects through the appropriate land use plan amendment and NEPA analysis procedures, and conduct any necessary ESA consultation procedures (see Appendix 18 in the Final EIS).

## Extending Favorable Conditions to Meet Overall Aquatic/Riparian/Hydrologic Objectives

During ICBEMP plan implementation, it is anticipated that aquatic restoration activities will

initially focus on A2 subwatersheds, using low-risk approaches. However, securing populations in subwatersheds may necessitate restoring subwatersheds upstream and downstream from a stronghold even though such areas may not be designated as A1 or A2 subwatersheds. Providing connectivity and distribution of populations and habitat, creating a dynamic system of productive habitats responsive to future changes in condition from disturbances, and meeting other aquatic/riparian/hydrologic objectives will similarly necessitate restoring and securing areas outside current A1/A2 subwatersheds. Such needs can be identified and actions planned and accomplished without need of formally designating these areas as an A1 or A2 subwatershed.

The step-down process would again be the basis for determining these needs. Subbasin Review and EAWS would identify needs (based on resource status and risks) and opportunities and set priorities for extending favorable conditions to meet associated aquatic/riparian/hydrologic objectives. Land use direction considered necessary to achieve these favorable conditions beyond A1/A2 subwatersheds or Riparian Conservation Areas may be found to conflict with existing land use plan direction. In such cases, appropriate plan amendment and NEPA analysis procedures would be followed and Endangered Species Act consultation would occur as necessary. As subsequent projects are designed, that also will be subject to NEPA compliance and Endangered Species Act consultation requirements.

## Monitoring

The Implementation and Effectiveness Monitoring Strategies being developed for ICBEMP will include questions relevant to aquatic/riparian/hydrologic objectives. Specific to the A1/A2 component, monitoring will help ensure general consistency in system adjustments from subbasin to subbasin; provide broad-scale oversight for mid- and fine-scale adjustments, especially for more widely distributed aquatic species; and facilitate adaptive management of the system. Monitoring questions can be designed to determine whether A1/A2 areas have been validated through mid- and finer-scale assessment or planning processes, whether A1/A2 direction is being followed, and whether the aquatic core area components, as well as the entire aquatic/riparian/hydro-

logic network, are meeting their overall objectives. Findings relative to effectiveness monitoring could be used to further adjust the A1/A2 system to better meet its intent.

## Summary

The aquatic/riparian/hydrologic component of the ICBEMP management direction uses several tactics to address the goal of maintaining and restoring aquatic habitat consistent with natural disturbance regimes. These tactics include establishing a system of aquatic core A1/A2 subwatersheds as well as establishing a system of Riparian Conservation Areas, broad-scale restoration priorities and strategic

guidance, requirements for multi-scaled analysis, a monitoring strategy, adaptive management direction, and a collaborative implementation structure. These systems and processes are designed to best meet the overall goals of the aquatic/riparian/hydrologic component. Using the step-down process to validate and adjust the A1/A2 system, as well as to identify key areas for extending favorable conditions to achieve overall aquatic/riparian/hydrologic objectives, helps to ensure that the component systems dynamically respond to new information or changes in conditions. Effectiveness monitoring results, and the results of other collaborative processes, such as consultation and recovery planning for listed species, further facilitate the adaptive, dynamic nature of the overall aquatic/riparian/hydrologic component.